つくろい屋シリーズ

あわいの森

Awai no mori

前田とも

Tomo Maeda

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The Tailor Series

あわいの森

The Pale Forest by Tomo Maeda

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Contents

Chapter 1 The Pale Forest 003

Chapter 2 The Reflective Lake 044

Chapter 3 The Rainbow Flower 085

Chapter 4 The Mingled City 123

Side Story What the Heart Feels 160

Hey there, travelin' folk.
Why don't you rest a spell and take a look at my wares? They're cheap, and pretty darned tasty too, if I do say so m'self.
I've got cheeses cured in salt and pickled in vinegar, smoked meats, wine made from fresh fruit--
heck, I've even got fruits and vegetables. Everything you see here's all picked fresh and made in our village just up the way
A market stall? Way out here in the forest?
How's that working out for you, gramps? You ever get any business?
Oh, I don't expect to get rich offa it. Just sharing my hobby with the rest of the world, that's all.
Tell me it tastes good, and that's all the happiness I could ever ask for.
The Pale Forest
You'll find something you like, I guarantee it.
Go on, try a bite.
I think I'll take you up on that...
BOOM
...Hm?

...Huh?
Did you hear something strange just now...?
!
...What is that?
Look! Over there!
...From what I hear,
some people died.

You know that village near the big, black tree in the center of the blue forest?
I hear they found a traveler dead by the roadside near there with a bit of half-eaten food next to him.
Ah. That explains why all those officers have been hanging around.
There's been a lot of talk about that lately, eh...
...His wife and child came down with a fever.
They were fine when they went out to gather some vegetables yesterday, but the minute they came back...
Maybe they were tired after all that searching?
...They passed away.
Didn't someone turn up dead in the forest just the day before yesterday, too?
You don't suppose...
There's *poison* in those parts, do you?
ザッ!

shuff
shuff
shuff
shuff
shuff
shuff
shuff

...Hello Mr. Traveler, sir.
My name is Kukuru, and yes, I am alone.
Straight ahead is the White River village. To your right, you'll find the Desert of Golden Sands, and back the way you came is the Red Mountain town.
Have a nice day.
Oh, hello.
What a cute forest-keeper!
Are you all on your own, little miss doll?
...Huh?
!
ERm...

Is she broken...?
.....
...Actually, I'm trying to get to the village by the black tree.
Back the way you came is the Red Mountain Town.
...Uh huh. And to the left is...?
To your right, you'll find the Desert of Golden Sands.
Ahem... I'm, ah... I'm Rem, a traveling tailor.
Straight ahead is the White River village.
Well... Thanks for your time, anyway.
!
Not that I was lost or anything. All's well that ends well, I guess.
See you.
W-WAIT!!
Huh?
...If this is the Blue Forest, then the village by the black tree should be to the left, right?
Huh?
A... A PASSAGE PERMIT! YOU NEED A PERMIT FOR PASSAGE TO GO TO THE LEFT!
What? But...
YOU CAN'T GO THAT WAY! YOU MUSN'T!!

BUMP
Hm. This really puts a kink in my plans...
ERm...
Um,
EH?
What, really?
No one mentioned I'd need one of those.. Well, who's issuing them?
You have to, um...
I had very urgent business to take care of in that village.
.....!
The permits. Do you know where I can get one?
W... Well, you see...
Hmm...
I'll see you later then, um... Little Kukuru?
AH!
Oh well, I suppose I'll just have to go back and ask around town.
I'd rather not stop in one place for too long, but...
You wouldn't happen to be a traveler, would ya?
Well, well! What do we have here?
Wh... What sort of business were you-
Wait!
If you don't mind my asking, um...

Hm? Ah, yes, that's right. Are you from the village?
You bet. Oh, is that you, Kukuru?
Y-Yes!
So where are you coming from, mister?
Oh... Here and there.
I'm kind of a wandering...
?
What's the matter, Fella?
Hm? Oh, no. It's nothing...
Ah, you're probably tired from your journey!
Tell ya what. Why don't you come visit our village and rest up for a bit, eh?
Oh, I'd love to, but I'm afraid I don't have a permit...
A permit?
Eep!
Well, just stop by for a spell, eh?
You gotta try our wine.
Now why on earth would you need one of those?
Oh! Haw haw, I get it. You're a real kidder, aren't ya?

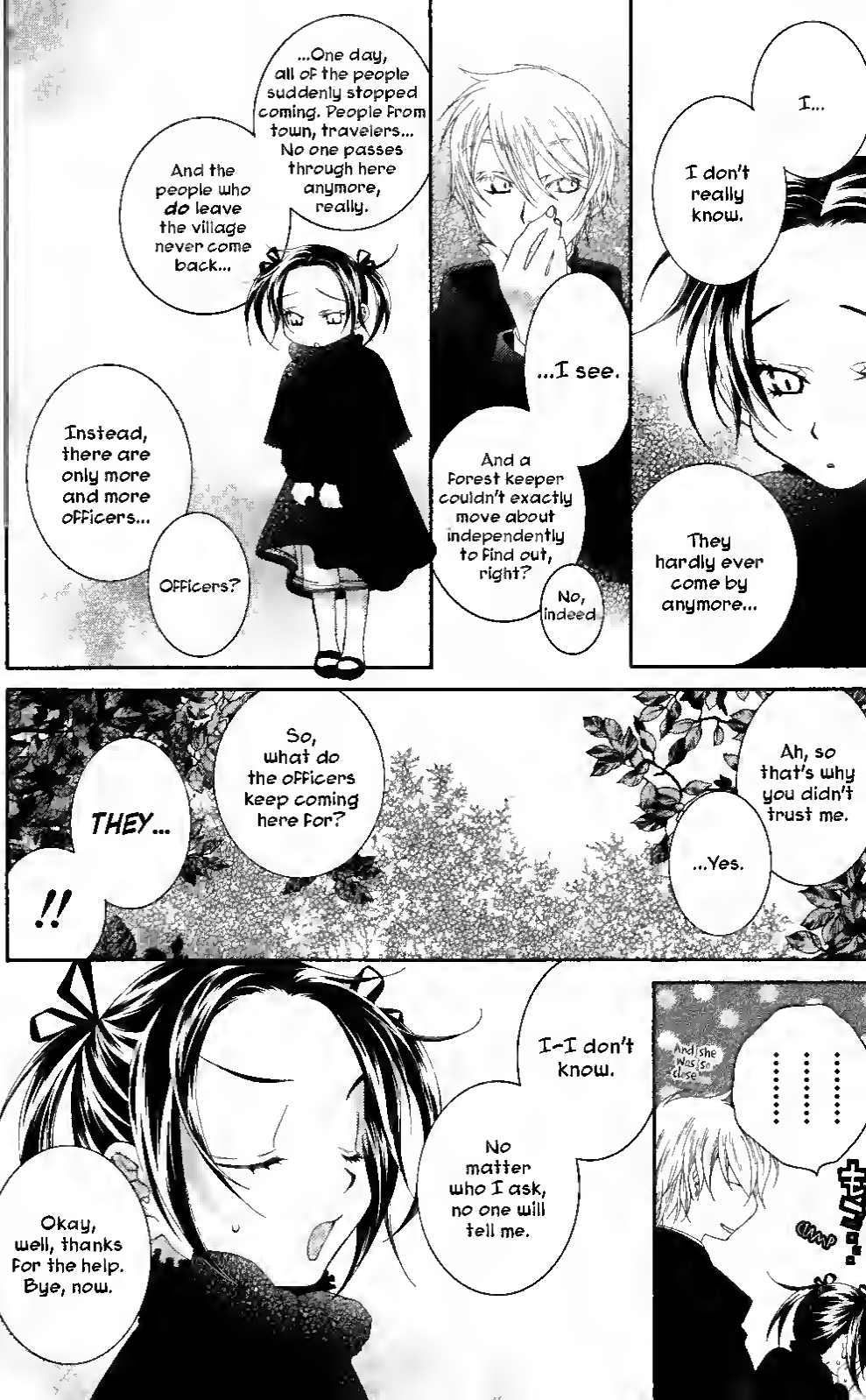
WINE?
WELL, HECK! I'M SOLD!
Follow me!
TUG
...What's wrong?
Hey, traveler. Village's this-a-way.
Oh? Uh, right...
Actually, could you go ahead without me?
Huh?
UH, WELL...
I SAW THIS REALLY STRANGE MUSHROOM BY THE SIDE OF THE ROAD, AND I WAS KIND OF HOPING TO GET A BETTER LOOK AT IT...
You Whaa-?
Ahhaha!
You've got a different kinda humor, don't ya?
Well, all right. I'll go on and let the others know to expect ya.

You're a real prankster, aren't you, doll?
Didn't anyone ever teach you that lying is wrong?
...I know... And I'm really very sorry...
Sure will!
SLIDE
...I'll be right...
There!
YANK
!!
YOU WILL BE COMING BY...
WON'T YOU?
But, um,
that important business you mentioned- what is it?
You're not a police officer, are you, Mister Traveler? Are you?

...Though on second thought, maybe I could risk tipping them off about a certain Forest-keeper who likes to tell tall tales~
EH?!
Um... Um um um um um, ummmmmm um um—
Ha ha! Just kidding.
!
...Well, I don't want to tangle with the officials around here, that's for sure.
They're not in the most forgiving of moods at the moment.
What a relief.
Though a connection or two with 'em might be nice.
There is something I want to know from you, though.
What makes you think it's such a bad idea for me to go this way?
.....
Sorry, sorry!
There, now we're even!

.....
...It's okay. I wouldn't blame you for it, really.
.....!
Even I've heard the rumors...
...Hm?
Wh...
Wh-wh-wh-which ones!?
Which? Hmm, let's see here...
Well, you can never put much stock in rumors, but... Oh, so you've heard them?
I...
I HEARDN'T THEM!
Yes!
?
...Oh boy. You're a real laugh.

...What kind of folks are they?
beam
OH, I LIKE THEM ALL VERY MUCH!
How do you like the villagers around here?
Let's see... Oh, right.
Alright, well, let's change the subject
They're very nice people.
They make all sorts of delicious things,
and they used to tell me they liked it the most when people ate what they made for them!
They even made this dress for me!
...And what about now?
Really?
I helped!
AND ONCE A MONTH THEY USED TO OPEN UP A MARKET PLACE RIGHT HERE,
AND PEOPLE CAME FROM AAAALL OVER TO BUY WHAT THEY MADE!
Current Mood
Huh?
SINK...


...One day, all of the people suddenly stopped coming. People from town, travelers... No one passes through here anymore, really.
And the people who do leave the village never come back...
Instead, there are only more and more officers...
Officers?
...I see.
And a forest keeper couldn't exactly move about independently to find out, right?
No, indeed
I...
I don't really know.
They hardly ever come by anymore...
THEY...
!!
So, what do the officers keep coming here for?
Ah, so that's why you didn't trust me.
...Yes.
Okay, well, thanks for the help. Bye, now.
I-I don't know.
No matter who I ask, no one will tell me.
And she was so close...
.....
Ohh!

...that there's some basis to the rumor that people are still dying inside this forest?
...Unless the reason is, of course...
Ah, but I saw no valid reason not to go from the conversation we just had...
You mean you're...? Oh, wait! You can't go that...!
Huh?
.....
.....
HUH!?
I MADE HER CRY!?
Sniffle
Sniffle
Wha~!? Oh, jeeze...!
I'm kidding! I'm sorry! I didn't mean it!
sniffle
Sniffle
sob

I'm really sorry. I wish it could be any other way,but I have a job to do...
...and there's no turning back until I see it through.
But if you really want to know what I'm up to...
TUG
...come with me.
!?
Wh-What are you doing?!
I'm not supposed to leave without permission!
You'll be fine! Consider it a work trip.

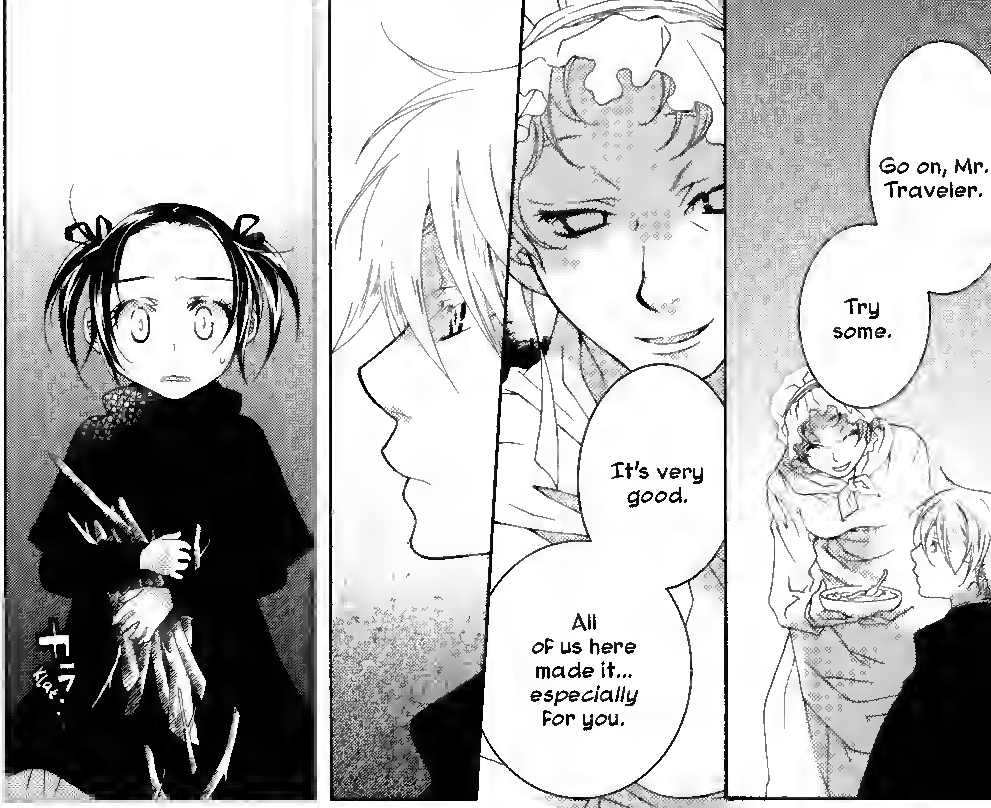
Alright, we're here.
This is the place, right?
Wow...
What a cozy little hamlet.
Okay, now to find that old man...
Um...
May I ask you for a small favor?
.....
Could you please promise me...
...that while you're here... in the village...
...you won't eat or drink anything?
!!!
What do you mean by...?
Oh!
There he is! Hey, over here!

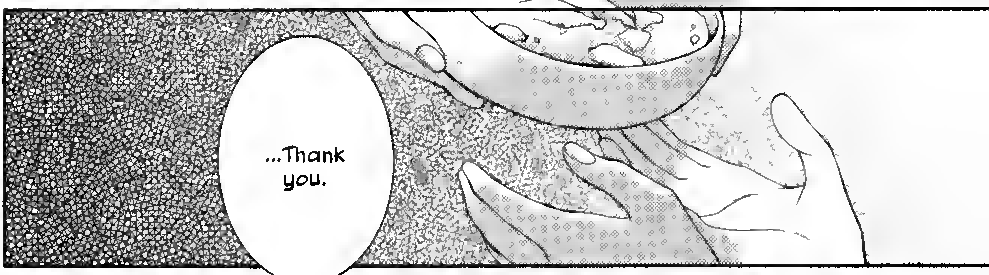
Over here, traveler.
We've been expecting you.
Oh, now this is something! It isn't every day we see you here, Kukuru!
Now, now, don't just stand there. Come on over.
Okay,
We're coming.
JERK
Come along, now...
QUICKLY...
GRASP

How 'bout some wine? Here, we've got plenty.
You haven't drunk a drop since you got here!
Oh, what's this?
Er... Ah, well...
You know, I actually just got a refill!
(a lie)
You said you're a wanderer, ain't that right?
How are things in the world outside?
Funnily enough, I hear the country to the west sent a man to the moon.
Well, Fancy that! How'd he manage it? He sprout a set o' wings, or something?
...And in the east, they can make a horse of iron that will run a thousand miles in one day.
Well, I'll be...
Well, let's see...
Be a dear and help me with this.
Kuku-ru!
...Did ya?
...Sounds like the stuff of fairy tales, almost...
Knowing those big ol' Fancy countries, they must be racin' to outdo each other, I'll bet.
They just don't know what it's like to live.

...Now, there's some other news I happened upon recently...
Have you heard of the village that poisons people?
It even pertains to this area, actually.
...That's a pretty nasty rumor, there.
Do they like telling stories like that in the big city?
How 'bout I top you off.
Thanks, I've already got some.
It's not a big-city story. Haven't you heard?
They mix poison in with the food they make and sell it to unsuspecting out-of-towners,
release it into the forest surrounding the village; that sort of thing.

Now... People won't even go near the place
So many have fallen ill after entering the forest, the officers have been tirelessly searching the area for some kind of explanation
The ground outside the village is littered with the bodies of the dead, humans and animals alike.
...Well, can't say I've ever heard of that before.
Why would anyone from that village of yours be keen on so much killing?
There doesn't seem to be much point in it all... But of course it's just a rumor, right?
!
...Isn't that frightening?
...So it is.
You can never tell where the truth ends and the lies begin.
But...
Come, come, let's not talk about that now!
RUSTLE


Go on, Mr. Traveler.
Try some.
It's very good.
All of us here made it... especially for you.
Eh?
Wait.


...Thank you.

...
Aren't you going to eat any?

...I'm curious to find out, myself...
Go on, it's delicious stuff!
The onions came straight from my family's farm.
And the tomatoes and parsley came from mine.
...what the people of that village are really after. What it is they want.
That little bit of rice in there makes all the difference, doesn't it?
I think we outdid ourselves this time.
And if I could, I'd want to grant that for them.
What they truly desire.
...If I ate this soup...
...would that...
...grant your wishes?

That's why you kept trying to misdirect me.
Because you doubted them.
YOU'RE WRONG!!
!
Kukuru...
You've heard the rumors too, haven't you?
Yes, I... I've heard terrible...
...terrible things...!
But I promise you, these aren't the people you think they are!

You don't know like I do!
How much time and effort they put into the things they make...
...and even now, you saw how much work they put into that soup!
They made it so patiently, so carefully, just so you would like it!
That much is true.
Yes, many people have died in this area lately.
But these people who put so much work...
...and so much love into something for someone else to enjoy...
...would never, ever mix poison into it!

You're abso-lutely...
Positively...
WRONG!
...Listen.

...It was very potent, and very deadly.
...there was an accident at a factory north of here,
and the ensuing explosion released a deadly toxin into the air.
I've heard two different stories.
The first was the one about these villagers poisoning other people,
But according to the second...
...It was something never meant for humans to handle.
Smaller than a grain of sand, it was tasteless, colorless, odorless, and there was no antidote.
It tainted the soil and the water, and they were left with no choice but to write off the entire area.
In the adjacent regions, ugly rumors began to spread,
and people began to suspect the villagers here of foul play.
The officials attempted to cover up the accident,
but in the meantime, living things began to die...

someday, the time will come when the truth will be known,
...What...?
"Died...?"
...But even if people doubt their innocence now,
and just as she did to me,
The officials realized they couldn't hide the truth from everyone, so they told only the villagers what had really happened.
Some fled, never to return, but most of them stayed. It was their hometown, after all.
But with their food and water supplies both completely tainted by the substance,
the people slowly began to die, one by one.
I'm sure this girl...
...will be able to tell your story to others.
Of that, you can rest assured.
And...

I believe in your innocence, as well.
Here is my proof.
Oh....!
CHOKO
Hmm...
MUNCH
Yep!
It tastes great!
You...

Here, Traveler! Try some of this!
And this!
And this!
You like it, do ya?!
Well, of course ya do! It's our best soup, after all!
YEAH!
Here ya go, these come from the mountain up north.
They taste best this time of the year!
How do you like cheese?
How's it taste? It's not too sweet, is it? Do you want some salt?
What about pepper, do you need any pepper?
...We used to have so much fun eating this together, didn't we?
Those days seem so long ago, though.
Come on, now! You can eat more than that! You're still young!
I've got some great pickled stuff. This stuff coated in red's especialy good...
And how about some fruit wine to go with that?
Do you like it?
...Did you enjoy it?

We're so glad you liked it...
Oh... Thank you.
Thank you...
SHING
What's wrong, every-
?!

!!!
Eh?

Wh...
H-
Huh?
...They're gone, now.
You can rest easy, now.
There we go.
They've gone to be with God.
Where did the villagers go?
Who are you?
...
Me?
I'm Rem,
a traveling tailor.

There are many other worlds outside the one we're in right now;
some of them lie side by side, and others completely overlap. But there are always boundaries between them, and walls which separate one from another.
But those walls can be a little brittle, so from time to time, holes might open up between them. They usually close up with time,
but sometimes, they get bigger.
Take the hole inside this village, for example.
The world it connected to happened to be the land of the dead, which reanimated the deceased, for a time.
And it's my job...
....to tailor those holes shut.
Is there something in my eyes...?
Hm...?
.....?

SNUFF
...Granting their last desires was just an added bonus.
SMACK
SMACK
SMACK
Then again, they seemed pretty satisfied with what you had to say.
Maybe I didn't even have to do anything this time.
They really did like it when people enjoyed their food though, didn't they?
!
Oh-
Oh, that's right! You ate their...
A-Are you sure you're all right? What with the poison-

A-And... Oh, gosh! What about me? Am I.. Am I dead, too...?
...Are you serious?
I kind of figured you weren't aware one way or another, but...
You'll be fine.
You're a doll, after all.
...Huh?
...What, you never suspected. Not even a little.
You didn't find it the least bit peculiar that they would leave the forest's upkeep to a little girl like you.
Didn't you ever think that you were a little... I don't know, different from everyone else.
I have wondered...
Like why other people stopped moving at night.
Oh, and what in the world they used a "math-room" for.
You don't say...
She's got a positive attitude, I'll give her that..

Your name, "Kukuru"... In an ancient language, it's a word that means "Doll."
And it only makes sense that the keeper of the forest would, of course, be a doll.
Though it is a wonder that whoever made you would do so in such a way that other people wouldn't think you were a doll.
Ah...
...but then again,
maybe you were made that way so you could meet those kind villagers.
Kind...
...So kind...
So, Kukuru,
what are you going to do now?

I loved them all so much.
But now... They're...
Most people don't live around here anymore,
but if you want to keep taking care of forests, I can escort you to the nearest police station.
Or if you want, you could...
They're all...
Kukuru.
You can come with me, if you'd like.
You could go out and tell their story, just like I said before.
Would you want to go together?
In truth,

I was very afraid of leaving that place behind me.
But the hand he held out to me was so warm, and so soft...
...and it felt a little sad, all at the same time...
But as I squeezed his hand back, all of my fears seemed to disappear, so that the road ahead didn't seem so hard to travel.

Awai no mori

Tomo Maeda

Tsukuroi Scans' Awaiting Moon, ch. 01

"The Tale of the Princess Kaguya"

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